July 8, 1997

Dear Petie:

I've tried calling, and will again, and I've tried getting a message to you. This is in case all else fails. I suspect you'd rather be left alone but as you probably know better than any of us, to love Charlie was having to share him with a multitude.

I'd rather be there, in Chapel Hill, in New York, rather than half a world away, at my computer, searching for the right words -- the right words for you, for Charlie, for myself. He'd know what to write, of course. That was part of his gift.

I remember my first glimpse of him, stepping into an elevator at 420 Lex clutching a Portuguese dictionary, on his way to Rio. My last glimpse of him was heading northeast out of Sun Valley in his 4-wheel drive, bound for Montana. In between, for thirty-five years, he was among the most important and most beloved people in my life. I somehow realized at the time how precious those few days in Sun Valley were, and how much they reminded me of so many other days we had shared in California and New York. I didn't realize just how precious.

We did some things that were memorable. And sometimes we were simply grown-up kids: throwing rocks at telephone poles, pitching pennies, challenging a roulette wheel, playing golf at dawn on a water-logged course in New England, or in a hail storm in Arizona (his idea), arguing about one thing or another. He could make me do things I might otherwise not have felt ready for -- eat grits; make my first film.

I'm struck by the fact that Charlie died on July 4th because he was a patriot in the very best meaning of the word. He loved America, the idea of America, and its people – not indiscriminately, but deeply. He had no patience for the pompous or pretentious, for hypocrisy or intolerance. And, except for the Yankees and the Tarheels, I knew him always to stand up for the underdog and the disadvantaged. And for friends, I can testify.

I wouldn't try to tell you he was perfect but he was as good as you get in this life. And he represented a generation for whom television news was journalism, a noble profession, an art, a craft, a civic responsibility, a calling. For Charlie it was not just another road to riches, or fame. He wasn't above all that. It just wasn't what defined him.

As I say, and as you must know, he made an important difference in my life. Perhaps one proof of his greatness is that there are several million people who never knew him who feel the same way.

Charlie never needed a producer, or director, and certainly not a writer, but in his unfailing grace and generosity he made you feel needed. He had his own distinctive voice. He had his own statement to make and he made it, seemingly without effort, certainly without need of a dictionary or thesaurus. It was in his head, and heart; it was in his bones. And the rest of us were simply fortunate to be within earshot.

With love,

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